

HUMAN AS RELATIONAL

A STUDY IN CRITICAL ONTOLOGY



JOSEPH KAIPAYIL

A human person, as an embodied conscious being, stands in relationality with the world and other humans. The human being is a being-in-relationship. We live our life in relationship with the world around us, particularly with other humans, and make sense and satisfaction of life.

Human life, in its relationship with the world, takes on a triple relationality, viz. epistemic, ontic and ethic. I exist, I know (and act upon) the world, and I deal with other humans - these constitute our lived experience. They are respectively the ontic, epistemic and ethic dimensions of our existence. Using the method of critical ontology, the present study attempts to uncover this triple relationality of human existence.

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*For those men and women
who, in relationality, serve the least advantaged*

CONTENTS

Preface	ix
1. Critical Ontology	01
2. Epistemic Relationality	15
3. Ontic Relationality	26
4. Ethic Relationality	50

PREFACE

This work is a sequel to my *Critical Ontology: An Introductory Essay* (2002), in which I propounded a new method of philosophizing called Critical Ontology. The present book is an attempt to look at and understand the human person, using the method of critical ontology. The being-principle of the human person is interpreted and understood as relationality. To be human is to be relational. Humanity is relationality.

Boethius's classical definition of a person as an intellectual substance of a rational nature stands. Put simply, a person is a conscious individual. It applies to all beings that are conscious. Consciousness makes a particular a subject (person), and the absence of consciousness means a particular is an object (thing). Coming to ourselves, we too are persons. But we are human persons. The human person is not merely a *res cogitans* (Descartes), but an embodied existence. A human person, as an embodied conscious being, stands in

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relationality with the world and other humans. The human being is a being-in-relationship. We live our life in relationship with the world around us, particularly with other humans, and make sense and satisfaction of life.

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Considering that some of my prospective readers may be new to critical ontology, I have prefaced the present treatise by an essay on critical ontology. This essay, however, is not an abstract of my previous book. It is indeed a short revisit to it. In the light of responses from colleagues and reviewers, some more reflections have been added to critical ontology.

PREFACE

My confrères, colleagues and students have always been a source of encouragement and support. I thank them all. Thanks in large measure to Jose Thundathil, President of Jeevalaya Institute of Philosophy, for his great support. I should love to express my gratitude to Victor Ferrao and Belinda Garrett for their helpful suggestions and comments. I owe Alphy Thaikadan a special debt of appreciation.

This monograph is dedicated to those who have dedicated their lives, in human relationality, to the service of the least advantaged in society.

1

CRITICAL ONTOLOGY

Philosophy, Metaphysics and Ontology

Humans, as conscious beings, carry with them the epistemic quest, the quest to know the world they experience. Any kind of knowledge – scientific, philosophical, or religious – is due to this quest. Every epistemic enterprise is the human being's attempt to understand reality, including one's own life. Despite many similarities, the noetic character of philosophical investigation is different from that of science and religion. Science seeks to know reality, but it limits itself to the empirical. Science wants to explain the empirical in empirical terms. It is necessary for a scientific idea to be

tested for truth on observational evidences. Transpassing science, philosophy asks questions that are more fundamental and ultimate to our understanding of the world. In its attempt at knowing the ultimate nature and meaning of reality, philosophy makes the passage from the empirical to the transempirical or transcendent. Nonetheless, philosophical speculation is always based on the empirical, especially the results of scientific investigations. Religion also goes beyond the empirical to the transempirical. But religion's passage from the empirical to the transcendent is mediated primarily through revelation, faith and dogmas. Unlike religion and theology, philosophy's path is one of critical or rational reflection. A philosophical theory is a reasoned theory, a reasoned explanation regarding the ultimate nature of the world and human life.

Philosophy seeks the meaning of life as well. (Religion also does this job). As part of its inquiry into the ultimate nature of reality, philosophy searches for the meaning of reality. An object in the world acquires meaning and significance when it is related to human life. And philosophy, by unraveling the ontological place of humans in the world, brings meaning to human life. All philosophies should finally become the philosophy of life. So a philosophical theory is not merely an explanation of the world, but an interpretation, a hermeneutics of the world. Philosophy gives us rational and meaningful interpretations of the world. Philosophers fashion many a method to perform this interpretatively explanatory task of philosophy. Critical ontology is one such possible method in philosophy.

Critical ontology endorses the critical epistemology of Kant, which requires us to found all knowledge, philosophical knowledge included, on the analysis of our empirical experience. Critical ontology, however, is not sympathetic to the Kantian agnosticism of metaphysics. We submit that philosophy is essentially metaphysical, because metaphysics is philosophy's effort to comprehend reality in its ultimate principles and to perceive life's meaning in the light of that understanding. But there is a lot of misgiving and unease about metaphysics. Kant, following Hume, considered metaphysics as an impossible task. Logical positivists are averse to it; and for analytical philosophers it needs some reshaping. Of late, postmodernism, with its skepticism or even rejection of all foundational beliefs, appears to be unhappy with metaphysics. These critics of metaphysics take the discipline to be the traditional attempt to establish knowledge about a realm lying beyond the empirical world and hence a pure speculative, transcendent science. This very narrow, if not fully distorted, view should give way to a broad conception of metaphysics as a general inquiry into the nature of reality. Understood in this broad sense, metaphysical thinking constitutes the core of philosophical discourse. To rule out metaphysics is to rule out philosophy itself. Nor is metaphysics to be reduced to epistemology, as Kant did. (Kant restricted the scope of metaphysics to laying bare the conditions and limitations of possible knowledge). Philosophical reflection always implies a metareflection. As we have already observed, science explains reality in

empirical terms, supported by observational facts. Science, however, cannot exhaust our epistemic quest to know reality in its further depths. So philosophy fashions its own concepts and categories to understand and describe the world and interpret its significance for life. What is imperative is to make metaphysics a truly grounded discipline, a discipline that is grounded in empirical experience. Metaphysics is possible and productive, provided it is based on the analysis of the empirical. In other words, what is important is to make metaphysics “critical” in the Kantian sense. Kant’s critique wants us to base our knowledge on our experience of the empirical. A legitimate metaphysics must be a critical metaphysics. The concepts it makes and the propositions it puts forward must be rational postulations, resulting from our reflections on the world of experience, the concrete facts of our experience. This metaphysical passage from the empirical to the transcendent is made possible due to the inherent epistemic dynamism (ability) of the human intellect to achieve new and further insights into reality. Kant, for reason of his opposition to traditional metaphysics, failed to acknowledge this legitimate rational passage from the empirical to the transcendent.

Sometimes, the term ontology (theory of being) is used to mean metaphysics. Though metaphysics is wider in scope, the use is quite justified. Of all fundamental concepts metaphysics employs to understand the world, the most important one is that of being (existence). All metaphysical discourse is ultimately ontological discourse, the discourse

on being. The experience of existence - the experience that I exist and I perceive that the world exists - is the foundational experience that constitutes my consciousness. Though ontology is an alternate term for metaphysics, it traditionally means the study of being as such. Aristotle rightly considers this study of being, which investigates being and the properties characteristic of it, as the first philosophy, for it studies the first principles and ultimate causes of things. However, in the usage of analytical philosophy ontology means only a discussion of what kinds of entities exist. Critical ontology uses the term ontology in a sense pretty different from that of traditional ontology as the theory of being as such and of analytical philosophy as the theory of classification of entities. For critical ontology, ontology means the theory of being-principles. To this we turn next.

Critical Ontology

Critical ontology is investigation of things for their being-principles. For critical ontology, philosophy is study of things in their being-principles. It investigates a thing to find its being-principle. The human intellect wants to fully comprehend the object of its thought. This comprehension is possible only if we get a unified view of that object; and any unified view is possible only if we have the knowledge of the principle that makes the given entity, the principle that gives existence, unity and identity to it. Every entity has a principle around which

that particular entity is organized. We call this organizing or constitutive principle of a thing as its being-principle. Being-principle is the ontological principle, the metaphysical reason, by virtue of which a given thing is what it is. All entities have their specific being-principles, accounting for their existence (not existence as such, but their particular existence) and nature. A philosophically adequate knowledge of an entity is the knowledge of its being-principle.

The being-principle remains at the core of a thing and permeates all layers of its existence. The being-principle brings the different layers of the object in question into existence and holds them together in unity, making it a specific entity. The possible being-principle is present at every layer of a given entity. It is by passing through the different layers that we can discover the being-principle of a thing we investigate. To know an entity ultimately means to know its being-principle. Until one discovers a thing's being-principle, one cannot claim to fully understand that thing. So we may say the proper object of the intellect is being-principle.

One entity can have only one being-principle. Otherwise, it will violate the principles of unity and identity for that particular reality. But one entity may have many subordinate principles, the principles which function subordinate to the one being-principle. Our "naming" or "wording" (interpretative understanding) of this one being-principle can differ, however. Your naming of the being-principle of a given entity can be different from mine. Philosophy cannot take any one particular interpretation of

reality as absolute. There can be legitimately different conceptions of the same reality. This does not amount to relativism or subjectivism. What it signifies is philosophical pluralism.

All entities – persons, things, actions, and abstract entities – have their being-principles. All these being-principles are transcendent principles. However, we do not entertain any dichotomy or dualism between the empirical (phenomenal) and the transcendent (noumenal). The former exists because and in virtue of the latter. Being-principles are not mere concepts of thought either. They are real, or rather they exist. In other words, being-principles are not mind's making; rather they exist things and the knowing mind discovers them. Being-principles are found and not made. Their existence, nonetheless, is not physical but metaphysical or transcendent. This does not mean that they pre-exist in a world of ideas (Plato). Of course, the question of ontological status of being-principles is hard to settle. Some may take being-principles to exist prior to the formation of entities. Others may hold that their existence is consequent on the formation of entities. It may be safe to assume that being-principles need not have the same ontological status. Depending on their ontological positions in the general scheme of things, being-principles may differ in their ontological claims. Happily, these issues are not very important for the immediate purpose of critical ontology. Critical ontology's objective is to interpret and understand the object of our experience. For this purpose it is enough to suppose that

being-principles are spatially and temporally coextensive with the objects in which they are present. Besides, our knowledge of a being-principle, even if it is ontologically preexistent, is always a posteriori. It is from the experience of an entity that we postulate its being-principle.

Each entity is a unique event, because of its unique being-principle. An entity is a unique “eventuation” of a unique being-principle. The being-principle of a thing accounts for that thing’s universality and particularity. In many respects the being-principle of a thing is common to all individuals of its kind. The being-principle of the human being is essentially the same for all humans. But there is some “specificity” which makes a particular human being unique and different from every other human. Let us suppose that the being-principle of friendship or companionship is love and care between people. A friendship comes into being only if this principle exists, and a friendship is true to the extent to which this principle is realized. But each friendship is unique. The friendship between F_1 and F_2 is different from that of F_3 and F_4 , albeit both being called friendship. The being-principle of a particular friendship has the “commonality” of friendship and the “specificity” of that particular friendship. John Duns Scotus called this “specificity” of a particular *haecceitas* (thisness) and the Vaisesikas named it *visesa* (particularity). When examining a thing for its being-principle, we should give due consideration to “specificity.” (We will call the specificity of a thing as its “difference” in the third chapter).

Critical ontology may have some similarity with transcendental Thomism, initiated by Joseph Maréchal

(1878-1944) and advanced by Bernard Lonergan (1904-84) among others, as both have faith in the ability of the human intellect to move from the empirical to the transcendent. But they differ with regard to the epistemic orientation of the intellect. According to transcendental Thomism, the human intellect is directly oriented towards the Supreme Being. In knowing the world the dynamism of the intellect necessarily advances all the way to the Absolute Being. In contrast, critical ontology does not have such a proposal. It holds that the intellect is necessarily oriented to being-principles; and God, interpreted as the supreme being-principle of the world, is the limit of our intellect. Our knowledge of the world terminates in the idea of the supreme being-principle. In other words, one's search for being-principles of the world can culminate in the discovery of the ultimate being-principle of the world, which we call God.

Method of Critical Ontology

The Kantian critique rightly demands that ontology be critical, i.e. it be based on the analysis of the empirical. Our first and certain experience is of the empirical and not of the transcendent. The discourse on the transcendent should be founded on our empirical experience and be a logical extension of our talk about the empirical. We need to approach reality without any metaphysical presuppositions. All metaphysical proposals and postulations are to be made a posteriori. The same is true of being-principle. Our discovery and knowledge of being-principles are done a

posteriori, because they are metaphysical postulations based on the analysis of our empirical experience.

Regarding the way of doing critical ontology, we propose a four-step method. The four steps or phases are: experience, analysis, postulation and application. Of these, the first three are heuristic (assisting to discover), because they serve to find out being-principles. The fourth one is functional, since it puts knowledge into action. The first three steps progressively create ontological knowledge and the fourth step brings this knowledge to fruition. In the first stage, which is identification of experience, we have unreflective, or rather prereflective, awareness of the object we investigate. In the second stage, which is analysis of experience, we gain reflective awareness of the object. And in the third stage, which is postulation or proposal of a being-principle, we arrive at ontic or ontological awareness of the object. (Ontic is a variant for ontological. The distinction is between “entic” and “ontic.” Entic is relating to an entity, and ontic is relating to its being-principle. Entic knowledge is mostly empirical knowledge. Here we are not unaware of Heidegger’s ontological difference. For Heidegger ontic or ontical is connected with an entity, and ontological is connected with the being of an entity). The knowledge we get by identifying or recognizing an object of experience is prereflective, because here we do not critically reflect on what we experience. The knowledge in the first phase, then, is prereflective entic knowledge. In the second phase we analyse the object of our experience with the intention of

understanding it, and hence the knowledge is reflective entic knowledge. In the third phase, we gain knowledge of the being-principle of a given entity, and thus this knowledge is ontic knowledge. In the fourth phase we do the application of ontic knowledge to life.

We will examine in some more detail the epistemic process of critical ontology outlined above. As was said, the first step of ontic search is identification or recognition of experience. We make out what our empirical experience of the given reality we choose to reflect upon is. Any empirical experience that we are conscious of - things, persons and all what affect our personal and communal life - can become the object of philosophical reflection. That which is given to us in empirical experience is called the “given; and the “given” is the subject matter of philosophical thought, as in scientific investigation. For an ontology to be critical (grounded in empirical experience), the empirically “given” should become the starting point of its philosophical thinking. The epistemic movement is to be from the empirical to the transcendent. If the movement is the other way round (from the transcendent to the empirical), our metaphysical explanations of the world will not have epistemic justification. Pure speculative reason can only produce the antinomy of pure reason, as Kant argued.

The next heuristic step of critical ontology is analysis of experience. We critically analyse the “given” to understand what it is. We examine the data of our experience, using logical and mathematical concepts, philosophy’s various

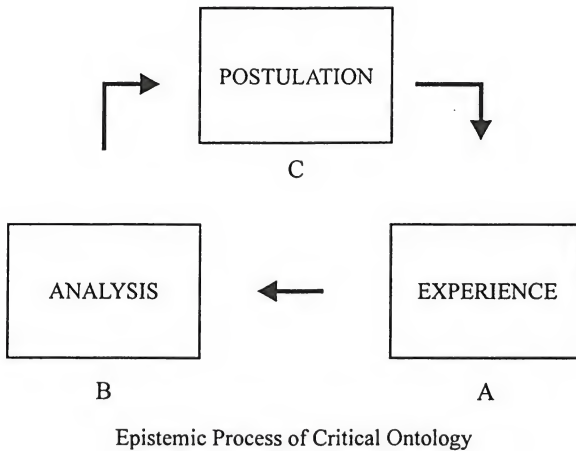
conceptions and methods, and tools and insights of natural and social sciences. We can employ any available legitimate means to analyze the “given” and discover its being-principle. Analysis of experience is a tough task, because every reality we experience is multi-faceted, with many layers of its existence. The Taittiriya Upanishad, chapter two, provides a helpful imagery when it speaks of five spheres of reality, viz. matter, life, mind, consciousness and bliss. Any reality we experience is complex and needs to be analyzed at various levels and in different aspects. If one wants to understand an entity, one has to open up its different layers. It is by opening up the layers of an entity that one uncovers the being-principle inherent in it. Take, for example, human life. Our experience shows that we have physical, psychological, social and spiritual realms of existence. All these realms are interrelated and together they constitute one reality of our life. We live our life at these levels and make our life a lived experience. To understand what human life is, we are to reflectively pass through these realms. It is only by analyzing and correlating these realms we come to the discovery the being-principle of the human person.

The third heuristic step is ontic postulation. In this stage, our knowledge of the world moves from entic (pertaining to an entity) understanding to ontic (pertaining to its being-principle) understanding. From and based on the analysis of the empirical, we make a rational postulation as to what the being-principle of the given entity is. In the analysis of experience we are “spreading out” a thing, while here we

are “gathering up” that thing to get a unified view of it. Unless we have a unified view of an entity, we cannot have a proper conceptual grasp of that entity. An entity is gathered up around its being-principle, and our discovery of this being-principle gives us the required unified understanding of that entity. From the analysis of the different layers we make a rational postulation of this unifying principle. This rational postulation or proposal should be the logical conclusion of our analysis. It should be as if a being-principle naturally discloses itself from within an entity.

Philosophy, as we have already observed, brings the world to bear on human life and thus brings out the world’s meaning for us. Critical ontology does this interpretative job of philosophy in its exposition of being-principles. Our exposition of a thing’s being-principle should be such that we bring out that thing’s meaning for human life. (In this sense, critical ontology is doing an ontic hermeneutics of the world). If being-principles are really meaningful explanations of the world, they will have great relevance in our daily life. Hence in the formulation of a being-principle it becomes important that we take into account its bearing on life. Here we enter the fourth phase: application of ontic knowledge to life. The fourth step of critical ontology is therefore a return to the empirical. The return from the transcendent to the empirical completes a cycle of ontic knowledge. We return to the empirical with the insight or vision of being-principles for relevant action. We put our ontic knowledge into action. This return to the empirical need not be the end of our epistemic,

or rather ontic, journey. It can become the beginning of another cycle of knowledge. New experiences will require us to revisit our ontic knowledge, either for its confirmation or revision. Critical ontology, like any other form of philosophy, is an ongoing process.



2

EPISTEMIC RELATIONALITY

We have noted in the preface to this book that to be human is to be relational. We exist by our relationships, and, in fact, the human self is made up of these relations. The being-principle of the human person is relationality, we suppose. Human relationality comes about in ontic, epistemic and ethic modes of our relation to the world (the world of things and persons). This triple-relationality is respectively our experience of I-exist, I-know and I-act. I exist in the world, I know the world and I relate myself to other persons. Though I-exist comes ontologically prior to I-think, the latter takes epistemological precedence to the former, because, as Descartes maintained by *cogito ergo sum*, my knowledge

of I-exist is the result of my I-think. Therefore, first we discuss human epistemic relationality.

Cognition and Consciousness

We are related to the world epistemically. We know the world and form our many beliefs about it. Knowledge is a relation. It is the relation between the knower and the known object. Knowledge is created by the interaction between the knower and the known. I and the world are epistemically related in a knower-known relationship. In the act of knowing I am relating myself to the world and the world is getting related to me. The world needs me to be known and getting its existence recognized. I need the world to become self-conscious. Cognition creates consciousness. Cognition creates in me consciousness of the world, and this consciousness of the world creates in me self-consciousness. My awareness of the world makes me aware that I am a knowing subject. Put it differently, in the act of knowing I become conscious of the object I know, and in becoming conscious of the object I become self-conscious that I am a knower. So we can say that it is in the act of knowing that we actualize our ontological intentionality and epistemological possibility to be persons (self-conscious beings). Thoughts make us self-aware in waking. In sleep we have only a quasi-self-awareness, created by dreams. (Dreams occur in wakelike pattern, mostly accompanied by rapid eye

movements. According to modern dream researches, dreams are required to make up for any cognitive and emotional deficits in waking, so that we maintain our bodily and mental equilibrium in waking. Unfulfilled wishes find their fulfillment in dreams, for example).

In knowing the world, I not only become self-conscious as a knower, but also become aware that I am a bodily entity and am part of the world I know. I am not a transcendent ego, but a bodily subject who experiences the world in my bodily possibility of having sensations and cerebral processing of these sensations into ideas and emotions. (The structure of our brain determines how we experience the world. Our experiences, in turn, influence how our brains receive, process and transmit information). As long as I am alive and awake, I will have sense experience of the world, including my bodily existence; and as long as I have sense experience, there is the possibility for me to know the world.

In the history of epistemology skepticism has always been a challenge to knowledge. Broadly defined, skepticism is the general disbelief in the possibility of knowing anything for certain. With regard to their doubt about the certainty of knowledge, skeptics have some justification. But they cannot invalidate knowledge itself. Even false knowledge (mistaken knowledge) is a kind of knowledge, because all knowledge is our consciousness of something. A false knowledge also is a thought about something. A false knowledge is untrue knowledge, though ignorance (absence of awareness) is no knowledge. Moreover, certainty is not the criterion of

knowledge. Sure knowledge is impossible in many cases. We cannot get at reality except through our sense experience and mental conception of it. Epistemologically speaking, the world is what we conceive of it. The world is our construction. (Epistemological construction is not the same as ontological construction. In other words, epistemological construction does not mean that there is no reality outside our concepts. Facts predate concepts). Our version of the world is limited, because reality is complex and we cannot comprehend it fully. So certainty is the ideal we want to achieve, but very often we fail to reach that ideal level of knowledge. What is required, therefore, is reasonableness of our knowledge. So skepticism is possible about particular beliefs and not about knowledge as such.

Knowledge is possible thanks to the knowing ability of the knower and the knowability of the known object. First, there is the knowing ability of the knowing subject. Humans have an innate quest to know. This epistemic quest makes a human person a being-in-search-of-knowledge. This quest is complemented by our mind's ability or dynamism to know what we experience. According to Kant, the human mind has in-built cognitive structures to know the world. For him, the mind constructs knowledge (ideas and judgements) by synthesizing sensations in its a priori (transcendental) categories. (Linguist Noam Chomsky and psychologist Jean Piaget also believe that we have certain genetically inherited cognitive structures that are preconditions of our learning and communication). Second, the world gives us the possibility

to be known. Anything that becomes the object of our empirical experience is knowable. All beings (things, persons and events) are open to our knowing of them. Medieval philosophers called this epistemic openness of things as “intelligibility” (comprehensibility) of being. Our actual knowledge of the world might be limited, but the world gives us the possibility to know it fully.

Postmodernism may pose a challenge to the epistemological optimism presented above. Postmodernism wants us to view the knowing self, knowledge and to some extent the known object itself as cultural constructs. The question if knowledge truly represents reality has become less worrisome. We agree to postmodernist thinking that knowledge-formation is determined by many factors and there is the prospect of knowing the world variously. My version or picture of the world is my construction. Epistemologically speaking, the to-be of a thing is the to-be perceived by me. All our knowledge, including that of mathematical and logical principles, is created a posteriori. But as we said, epistemological construction does not mean ontological construction. The world exists independently of me and predates my knowledge. A person or a thing does not exist for me until I perceive them, and they are to me what I conceive of them. This does not mean that they did not exist prior to my perception or that they are nothing more than what I understand of them.

Our epistemic relationality to the world is also clear in the intentional character of knowledge. Knowledge

(consciousness) is intentional, as demonstrated by Ramanuja, Aquinas, Brentano and Husserl. Epistemic intentionality is mind's direction (intention) upon the referent of its knowledge. All mental states are directed at some object. Consciousness is always consciousness of something and of someone, because it is the result of cognition. Cognition is our act of knowing an object. Knowledge is thus a relationship between the human subject and its intentional world.

Looking at the way we acquire knowledge, we can further elucidate the epistemic relationality of the human subject to the world. Knowledge is progressively created in three stages, namely sensation, conceptualization and judgment. Knowledge begins with sensations. The world is the object of this sense-experience. The mind synthesizes the sense-data into concepts or ideas. A concept is a mental representation of the object one cognizes. Knowledge is mediated through ideas or concepts. They are abstracted by the mind from the sense-data. Comprehension of an object is possible only when weprehend (grasp) it with mind, and mind cannot hold a physical object but only its mental representation in the form of an idea or concept. Knowledge of an object is complete when different concepts are connected in a logical order and expressed in the form of a proposition or judgment. A judgment is either an affirmation or a denial of the truth about the conceptual connection we make. Truth, hence, is the property of a statement. A proposition is true if its assertion agrees (corresponds) with the fact it affirms or denies. Truth is the agreement between an idea and its intentional object.

EPISTEMIC RELATIONALITY

My epistemic relationality moves on from the world of objects to the world of persons. In knowing the objective world I know myself that I am not an object but a knower, a subject. In knowing the world of things I transcend it as its knower. This brings me self-realization that I am a subject. But this solitary self-realization of one's subjectivity is inadequate and cannot bring me the full satisfaction of being a subject, because the object I know cannot recognize me as a subject. Only does another human being identify me as a subject and acknowledge my subjectivity. I truly become a person in the presence of other persons only. It is a subject, not an object, that can address me and communicate to me; it to a subject, not to an object, that I can address and communicate. Persons communicate to each other their consciousness of the world and their self-consciousness. They use symbols and language to articulate and communicate their thoughts and emotions. Animals also may have some thoughts and feelings; but they give expression to these mental states by gestures and sounds only. Only do humans have the ability to create and use symbols and language. Of these, language plays a very important role in human epistemic relationality. Language helps us conceive, organize and express ideas effectively. A thought or concept can exist independent of and prior to language. Even before knowing the meaning of the word "mother" and uttering it, a baby may have the concept of its mother as someone who cares for it. But language helps us to articulate our beliefs about the world and ourselves and communicate them to others.

Aesthetic experience is also part of our epistemic relationality to the world. For Aquinas, the beautiful is that which pleases us when perceived. Though subjective factors are important in aesthetic appreciation, beauty lies primarily in the form or appearance of the object. In an aesthetic experience the beholder becomes absorbed in the object for its own sake. It is “disinterested” (Kant) perception of the object of delight. We perceive a thing of beauty, not for personal interests but just for the delight it affords to us. In aesthetic experience, one’s consciousness of the beautiful becomes one’s contemplation of it.

Truth and Meaning

Traditionally knowledge is taken to be justified true belief (Plato, *Theaetetus*, 201c – 210b). Justification, truth and belief are thus defining components of knowledge. Knowledge is our belief about something. S knows that P, means S believes that P. For a belief to be knowledge, it must be true belief. S knows that P if and only if P is true. P is true only if it is the case that P. The statement “this is a rose” is true if and only if the object we refer to is a rose. A proposition is true, if the fact it asserts is the case. This factual nature of truth is clearly brought out by the widely held traditional theory of truth, called correspondence theory of truth. A proposition is true if it corresponds to reality it refers to. Coming to epistemic justification, it is finding adequate reason for taking a belief to be true.

Edmund L. Gettier, in his article "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" (1963), shows us counter examples where justified true beliefs fail to be knowledge. There may be cases where justificatory evidences are not real but mere coincidence. One can have justified true belief that P without actually knowing that P. The Gettier problem requires that truth and justification be looked at from a different perspective. Added to this is another problem, which I call "justificatory circularity." In order to justify a belief we may have to depend on some other belief, which in turn needs justification. Except for self-evident logical and mathematical principles, self-justification is impossible. We cannot get out of these two epistemic predicaments unless we stop to insist on absolute justification. What is needed is reasonableness of our beliefs and their truth claims. If we can reasonably justify a belief, we can hold it to be true. Truth is our epistemic acceptance of something to be factual. Truth is, therefore, a property of our beliefs. It is not a fact, but a positive quality we attribute to our beliefs. Relying on a priori (logical and mathematical) arguments and reliable a posteriori (empirical) evidences, we are able to provide a sensible justification for our beliefs. But there can be cases where justified beliefs are later proved to be false beliefs. The best example from science is geocentric theory. The people who held that theory had justification for it. So if we go for absolute justification and Cartesian certainty for knowledge, we may fall into skepticism. Certainty cannot be made the criterion of knowledge, because absolute

certainty is hard to achieve. We accept the truth claim of a statement not because we have absolute certainty about it but there exists some reasonably sufficient evidence. Hence, every justified belief is provisional. Until contrary evidence is shown, we can legitimately hold a reasonably justified belief. Something is accepted to be the case based on sufficient reasons. Knowledge is an on-going process. Every kind of knowledge is open to revision in the light of possible new evidences. No knowledge is immune to revision and even rejection. Scientific worldviews, for example, change as new discoveries are made. This is how the shift from a geocentric view of the world to a heliocentric one, or from the Newtonian view of absolute space and time to the Einsteinian view of relative space and time, took place. So knowledge is a reasonably justified belief. We may suggest a thesis of minimal foundationalism that can guide our justificatory check of beliefs. This thesis consists of three basic epistemic foundations. One, faith in the ability and disposition of the human reason to acquire knowledge. Two, acceptance of basic rules of logical and mathematical inference. Three, the need to base reasoning on our empirical experience.

In connection with truth and justification, let us speak a word about epistemic pluralism. We can have many conceptions of the world, because it is impossible to know the world as it is. We can know the world only to the extent to which it is given to our empirical experience. Moreover, many personal and cultural factors influence our perception of the world. So there can be many perspectives on reality. They are all epistemically legitimate ways of looking at the

EPISTEMIC RELATIONALITY

world, provided they can find a reasonably adequate justification. Each view is truth-in-perspective. But epistemic pluralism should not be construed as epistemic relativism or subjectivism. Pluralism is the possibility of knowing the one world variously.

Another property we attach to an epistemic belief is meaning. Cognition of an entity includes the perception of its meaning too. Analytic philosophy explains meaning in terms of truth. The meaning of a statement is what it states of the fact. The meaning of the statement “this is a rose” is that “this is a rose.” Without prejudice to this semantic understanding of meaning, we would give a relational interpretation of meaning. A referent of our cognition, a person or a thing, is meaningful to the extent to which it is related to us. We give meaning to the world, and the meaning of the world is what it signifies for us. Relationality means (gives meaning to) an entity. Pain a parent takes for his/her child, for example, holds a very profound meaning because of their relationship. Those persons, events and things that we consider meaningful bring meaning into our lives and make our lives meaningful.

3

ONTIC RELATIONALITY

By ontic relationality we mean the relation that the human person has at the being level with the world and ultimately its supreme being-principle. (Ontic, as we observed elsewhere in the first chapter, is a variant for ontological. Ontic also means relating to being-principle. Entic-ontic distinction replaces the Heideggerian ontic-ontological distinction). We try to comprehend this ontic relationality through certain ontological concepts, which are fundamental to our interpretative understanding of the metaphysical structures of the world. These concepts are important to the study of being-principles as well. Ontological concepts, which can also be called principles of being, are our metaphysical

conceptualization of the world. Science tries to uncover the physical structures of the world and forms empirical concepts, while philosophy seeks to discover the world's metaphysical structures and forms ontological concepts. There is no opposition between physics (science) and metaphysics (philosophy). They are to levels, empirical and transcendent, of our understanding of the world. The latter is founded on the former. Metaphysics is continuous with physics. Metaphysics without physics is imagination; physics without metaphysics is incomplete.

Philosophers have proposed several ontological concepts to explain the world, like Aristotle's substance, matter and form, actuality and potentiality, unmoved mover etc. No philosophical system can claim to provide a complete scheme of concepts, because reality is complex, even inexhaustible, and it can be understood and interpreted in many different ways. We would suggest the following set of concepts: existence, essence and difference, materiality and transmateriality, God, and the human person. The concept of being-principle is another ontological concept. It is central to critical ontology. Because we have already discussed it in detail, here we leave it off. Of those concepts we discuss below, God and the human person are categories too. Categories are ontologically basic types of entities. (Aristotle, for example, classifies things into ten categories: substance, quantity, quality, relation, place, time, position, state, activity and passivity).

Existence

Of all ontological concepts, the most fundamental one is the concept of existence or being. Though existence is a very abstract concept, it is the most intimate one too. I experience existence first and foremost as my existence. A conscious being, I am aware of my being. My experience of existence as the world's existence comes second. But these occur simultaneously. In every act of knowing the world I affirm my being and the being of the world. So we can say the human intellect knows existence (*esse*) directly in the act of knowing an entity (*ens*). To know a thing first of all means to know that it exists. Before knowing what a thing is, i.e. its essence or nature, we know its being. Unless we are aware that a particular thing exists, we cannot know its nature.

The idea of existence makes it possible for us to know that the world exists. We cannot think of an entity, real or possible, without first affirming its existence, real or possible. Affirmation does not mean predication. As Kant and Russell noted, existence is not a predicate. A thing exists prior to our attributing of existence to it. It is in virtue of existence that something exists. Nor is it merely the highest universal (*genus*) under which all existents fall. For a universal to exist, there must be existence prior to it. Also, the idea of a universal comes into question only in the context of the plurality of existents. So we can say the concept of being is a transcendental notion. First, it is transcendental in the sense found in medieval philosophy. It transcends all categorizations

and is coextensive with all entities. Second, it is transcendental in the Kantian sense. It is a transcendental condition (epistemic precondition) to know any entity. It is impossible to know the world without the idea of being, i.e. the idea that the world exists.

Among medieval thinkers, Aquinas and Duns Scotus disagreed about how the term being should be used to speak of beings. For Aquinas particular beings are being in different degrees. God, the Supreme Being, has fullness of being and all other entities participate in this Being and their claim on being depended on the degree of their participation. So the term being is to be understood analogically (meaning partially the same and partially different). Against Aquinas, Duns Scotus argued for the univocity of being. The term being is univocally applicable to finite beings and infinite being. For him the magnitude (quantity) of being differs. I favor Duns Scotus. Being means the same in all instances of its application. It is the amount of being, which I called "onticity" elsewhere (see *Critical Ontology: An Introductory Essay*, 2002, p. 51), that differs. However, the difference in degree of onticity could be explained by the Thomistic notion of participation. God has the fullness of onticity and finite entities participate in this onticity, as per the degree of their perfections.

Although existence or being is the most basic idea in our conception of the world, there is no need to mystify it, as did Heidegger. Because there exists no being per se, but only beings; no existence as such but only existents. There is no undifferentiated being, but only particular acts of being.

An act of being is called an entity or existent. An entity or existent is existence instantiated, i.e. an ontological instantiation. (It has become common to use “existential” to mean concerning human existence. So ontological remains the preferred option to mean relating to existence. “Existential” could be an alternative. But it would sound to be a derivative of existent). Being exists only as being of beings. Being as such has no actual existence. Its existence is conceptual. This does not mean that it exists only in the order of our thought. It, like other ontological concepts, is transcendent. A transcendent exists in or as a particular. Being exists in/as particular beings.

An entity can be real (actual) or possible. A real entity is an actually existing entity, whose existence the speaker is certain about. A possible entity is only a possibly existing entity, whose existence the speaker is unsure of. But we assert being to both the real and the possible. An entity that exists on its own is traditionally called a substance. In this sense any independent existent, which does not depend on something else for its existence and identity is a substance. (The independence of existence an entity enjoys is not unqualified. All entities in the world are interrelated. An entity exists in relation with other entities). Substance should not be understood as substratum that underlines properties of things and wherein those properties subsist. (Perhaps the Buddhist and Humean attack is targeted well at such a belief). A substance is a particular, with essential properties that define its identity.

Essence and Difference

All entities possess existence, essence and difference. Though existence could be seen as ontologically prior to essence and essence prior to difference, these three principles exist simultaneously and together they constitute an entity and define its being-principle. Existence is is-ness of a thing and essence is its what-ness (quiddity). Essence defines a thing; it makes a thing what it is. An act of being (a particular entity) is an instantiation of existence by its essence. Essence is common to the members of the same species. An essence is a universal, because it is the essential nature common to the members of the same class. Human-ness or humanity, for example, is universal to all humans. But essence cannot be equated with universal. A universal is an abstracted idea. But an essence is intrinsic to a thing, defining its nature. Even if there exists only one individual of a particular kind, it has essence. Since there is no second particular of its kind, this essence cannot be a universal. God, for example, by definition is one and hence the divine essence (divinity) can only be one.

One individual can be differentiated from every other individual of the same class only if its essence is further determined by some uniqueness. We call this differentiator (haecceity) "difference." Thus quiddity and haecceity together make the principle of individuation. An entity or existent is existence determined by essence and difference. Existence is individuated (instantiated) by essence and difference. Every

entity is a unique entity, with its self-identity characterized by essence and difference.

Of many elements that make a difference, relation is of special mention. An entity is often defined in terms its relations. Things stand in different configurations of relation with one another, and the property of relation plays an important role in determining an entity's distinctiveness. A particular child's relation to his/her parents as parents and him/her as their child gives them their uniqueness. This relation makes that child differentiated from other children. Philosophers usually make a distinction between internal relation and external relation. Internal relation is defining relation that inheres in the *relata* (sing. *relatum*). In the above example, the child-parent relation is internal. External relation is nonessential and yet perfecting relation.

One mode of relation that interests philosophers and scientists alike is causation. The cause-effect relation is not perceived but supposed and is generally accepted to be true. Scientists put great faith in the principle of causality, because it helps them explain physical occurrences in an intelligible manner. One example is physical and chemical processes that take place in the human body. Look at the causal relations involved in the mechanism of delivering oxygen to body cells. The respiratory system delivers oxygen to the circulatory system and the circulatory system carries oxygen to body tissues and removes carbon dioxide therefrom, and the whole process is controlled by the nervous system. The uncertainty principle in quantum mechanics (impossibility of specifying

simultaneously the position and momentum of a particle) has challenged our conception of causation. But in the final analysis we find that there do exist physical laws governing the behavior of subatomic particles too. Causation, however, should not be limited to cause-effect relation, albeit this being the primary sense and application. As Kant held, the belief in causation is a transcendental condition to know the world. Unless we organize our experience we cannot form an idea of what we experience. Thanks to our application of the principle of causation, we are able to experience the world in specific ways. For instance, interaction between particles, mediated by the four fundamental forces in nature (electromagnetism, strong force, weak force and gravitation), becomes unintelligible without the principle of causality.

Materiality and Transmateriality

The physical world is our everyday experience. But we do not perceive matter as such; we perceive only material things. Materiality is an ontological concept we employ to explain the nature of the perceptible physical world. The Cartesian concept of extension (*res extensa*) is perhaps the best available metaphysical description of the empirical world. Science supposes this when it tells us that the world is space-time. It is not that the world exists in space and time but the world exists as space-time. A material thing is a spatio-temporal extension. Spatiality of a thing is its three-dimensional

expanse and temporality is duration of its particular form of existence. As space and time exist together and one is inseparable from the other, they constitute the single concept of space-time. The space-time world is due to the extensive character of matter, the world-stuff, existing in the basic forms of interconvertible mass and energy. All building blocks of the universe - from the most elementary particles, such as quarks, leptons and bosons, to massive stars - have spatial and temporal extension. An entity that has this extension is empirically perceptible. Materiality is the principle that makes the extended world.

It is widely accepted that our universe began in the big bang, which a recent NASA microwave anisotropy probe has determined to have occurred 13.7 billion years ago. Space and time keep extending, as long as the universe continues to expand, apparently due to some mysterious force called antigravity. Some theorists predict a big crunch. Since the available matter in the universe is constant and limited, the universe will stop to expand at one point and all mass and energy will start to coalesce under gravitational pull. (Some astronomers deny the possibility of a big crunch. As the universe expands further, gravity will become less effective and stars and galaxies will be scattered in vast empty space). What will be the shape of the universe after tens of billions of years is anybody's guess now. Space and time might stop to expand, but they will remain as long as the world exists in some form.

ONTIC RELATIONALITY

What we have discussed so far is cosmic space-time. Each entity in the universe has its own particular space-time. This particular space-time is embedded in cosmic space-time. A particular space-time exists from "birth" to "death" of an entity. The law of conservation suggests that, as the total of mass and energy is constant, this birth and death is only a conversion of one form of existence to other. The particular space-time comes from cosmic space-time and returns to it. The space-time of the sun, for example, extends from its stellar birth in the nebula, nearly 5 billion years ago, to its expected death, in about 7 billion years, into a red giant and eventually a white dwarf. Coming to the particular space-time of a human being, we may call it personal or human space-time. It is one's lived space-time, which is for the most part one's bodily existence. Our lived space-time too is due to the world's materiality.

Just as the concept of materiality makes philosophical sense of physical entities, the concept of transmateriality makes philosophical sense of nonphysical entities. The metaphysical theories of materialism and physicalism want to interpret all phenomena in the universe in physical terms. For them the physical nature is all reality. But, in the first place, our experience of life and mind, which are nonphysical in nature, make us suppose that there is another mode of existence, namely transmateriality. Materiality and transmateriality are two basic modes of existence. Transmateriality is not the same as nonmateriality. Materiality and nonmateriality exclude each other, whereas materiality

and transmateriality connote a certain relation between them. Life and mind, for instance, are transmaterial, yet they exist in the physical entities.

Transmaterial entities are commonly called abstract entities in contrast to physical things, which are concrete entities. The most important feature of an abstract entity is that it lacks spatio-temporal properties. It cannot be located in space-time, though we can comprehend it only in relation to some concrete entity. My thoughts, for example, are abstract entities and yet they exist and are understood as thoughts of a concrete entity, which in this case is me. We may list four kinds of abstract entities. One, our mental states, such as thoughts, emotions and volitions. Though they are produced by brain functions, they are not physical realities. Two, empirical principles inherent in nature. Scientists propose them to make scientific sense of the world. They are not empirically perceivable, but are abstractions from perceivable facts. Gravitational effects, for instance, are perceivable, and yet the very principle of gravitation is beyond perception. An empirical principle is a thing of scientific postulation. Three, mathematical and logical concepts and principles. They are indispensable to our comprehension of the world. Four, metaphysical concepts and categories. These are principles to understand the metaphysical nature and constitution of the world. They are not meaningless talk and product of imagination, as some hold. They are metaphysical postulations based on our concrete empirical experience; and we employ them to understand things in their ultimate

principles. They cannot be dismissed without being dismissive of our epistemic quest to know things in their ultimate principles, to know the ultimate nature of the world.

Well, we come back to the topics of life and mind, the experience of which takes one to the conception of transmateriality. Life and mind are two expressions of transmateriality. For those who accept the possible existence of spiritual entities, spirit is still another expression of transmateriality. Transmateriality, however, is not to be identified with “spirituality,” though in our ordinary talk we use them interchangeably. That which is spiritual is always transmaterial, and not vice versa. Spirituality implies intelligence. The spiritual is both immaterial and intellectual. A spiritual substance is called spirit. Religion and philosophy often take God and soul to be spirits. Here we discuss only life and mind, leaving God and soul for next sections.

Physical entities fall into two broad divisions – living and nonliving. Living things are characterized by life. Life is not a substance, but a quality or function of a substance for organic activities like metabolism and reproduction. Life exists only in those entities that have some advanced form of chemical organization. Though there is a qualitative difference between a living thing and a nonliving thing, there is always a link between living matter and nonliving matter. Indeed, all the chemical elements that make up living things are also found in nonliving things. Most scientists believe that life arose in the universe from chemical reactions. Mixture of chemical compounds, receiving light and heat energy from different

environmental sources, formed simple organic molecules, such as amino acids and nucleotides, and they formed molecules of proteins, nucleic acids and lipids, which became the building blocks of cells. This does not mean that life can be reduced to mere biochemistry. The biochemistry is the subvenient condition on which the supervenient life exists. That which supervenes is higher in quality than that which subvenes. Transmateriality causes this supervenience. The emergence of life from nonlife, generation of further life from life and evolution of higher species of living beings – these are all due to the principle of transmateriality.

An organism that possesses advanced brain and nervous system is characterized by mind. Animals do have some mental states. But the human mind is more advanced, because our brains are better organized. The concept of mind stands for the totality of such functions as thoughts, memories, feelings, emotions and (unconscious) impulses. Descartes conceived of mind as a substance, which together with body, another substance, makes the human being. Today, with the advancement of human and cognitive sciences, people are uncomfortable with Cartesian dualism and tend to view the human person as a single whole of bodily and mental existence. Mental states, such as thoughts and emotions, are the result of complex brain functions. The brain's billions of neurons connect with one another in complex networks to produce consciousness or mind. A nerve impulse, for example, is caused by the depolarization of the neuron. On reception of a sensory input or any other stimulation, the

ONTIC RELATIONALITY

electric charge of a neuron is changed from negative to positive due to sudden influx of positively charged sodium ions into it. This electric impulse is transmitted to another neuron by the help of certain chemicals called neurotransmitters. These neurotransmitters either stimulate the receptor neuron to trigger a nerve impulse or to prevent it from producing one. These brain events generate mental states. Said this, scientists have to admit that they have not fully unraveled the mysteries of the human mind, albeit neuroscience and modern psychology have succeeded to demystify it. One example is the so-called psi phenomena, like extrasensory perceptions and psychokinesis, which are yet to find satisfactory scientific explanations. Further to say, mind cannot be reduced to or identified with brain functions. The brain functions are physical functions of electrical and chemical processes, whereas mental events they create are nonphysical. This is a category difference. By "category difference" we mean the property difference between two categories. Despite category difference there could be interactions, just as particles of opposite charges attract each other. The physical and the nonphysical contrast but need not contradict. As for mind, we can say the mental supervenes on the physical, or rather mental activity supervenes on the neural activity. Though there is always a causal relation between the subvenient and the supervenient, the latter is higher in quality than the former.

God: the Supreme Being-Principle

The big bang theory is currently the best available scientific explanation of the origin of the universe. However, it does not explain what existed before this cosmic event and what actually is this event or what is the principle behind it. No scientific theory will ever succeed to give a final explanation as regards the mysterious principle that directs the world-process. So, many philosophers put forward the concept of God, understood as creator and organizer of the world, to give an ultimate explanation of the world. (Note: To avoid a gender-specific language to speak of God, we repeat the word God in the place of its personal pronouns).

God, the Supreme Being, is seen as the ultimate ground of the world, the font of the being of the world. Nonetheless, the First Cause argument, which theism often cites to support belief in God's existence, runs into difficulty. If God can exist without a cause, why can't the world also exist without a cause? The world may also exist eternally with its inherent physical laws of self-organization. This challenge of naturalism to theism's God-concept, with its apparent God-world divide, needs to be addressed. The concept of God calls for an interpretation in relation to the world. God is not the cosmos, but God is to be perceived in relationality to the cosmos. Indeed, our God-talk is about God who acts in the world and human history. The God-concept is for our sake and not for God's sake. It is for our reasonable and meaningful comprehension of the world and

human existence. God is reflected upon in philosophy and religion primarily for God's being-for-the-world and not for God's being-in-itself. Hence, God's own being-principle could be understood as relationality. When Jesus, for example, introduces God as Father, he means to say God is related to us as a parent.

God and the world are not absolutely exclusive categories, though there is category difference between the two. *Ex nihilo nihil fit* (nothing comes out of nothing). The world is a fact. If so, it should either be eternal or should come out of an eternal, supreme being, a being which is of-its-own. The first alternative is naturalism and the second is theism. We have observed above that to answer naturalism, theism has to call attention to God's relationality to the world and the world's relationality to God. The theistic thesis, *creatio ex nihilo*, suggests this. It means to say that the being of the world is not of its own but comes from God. So we can say God-concept is not noncosmic, rather it is transcosmic. (The cosmic and the noncosmic exclude each other, while the cosmic and the transcosmic are related, with category difference). God is the world's being-principle. Just as every entity has its own being-principle, arguably the world taken as a whole (the whole world taken together as a single entity) has its being-principle. It is possible to interpret this being-principle in various ways, depending on the perspective one takes. God is one such interpretation of the being-principle of the world, albeit with a difference. God, as the source and guiding principle of other being-principles, is the

supreme being-principle. It is self-constitutive principle. In God exists the principle of all being-principles. The world does not exist outside of God, i.e. without God, because God is the ultimate being-principle of the world. God, as the supreme being-principle of the world, gives the world its existence and nature. The world, from big bang hitherto, has followed and will arguably follow an intelligent course of action. This world-process, including the possible state of the world before the theoretical big bang, is due to the world's ultimate being-principle. Nevertheless, God is not merely an intelligent organizer of the eternally existing world-stuff. The world comes from this supreme being-principle and returns to it. This doesn't mean that the physical world comes out of God. What exists in God is the principle of materiality, and a principle is always a nonphysical, or rather transmaterial, thing.

We have already argued that being as such (uncharacterized existence) does not exist, but only beings exist. Only do particulars actually exist, and God, like any other actual existent, is a particular. This particular is a self-conscious particular, hence a person. A person is conscious of oneself as a particular endowed with cognition, emotion and volition. Personality is a perfection of an entity. It belongs to entities of higher order, and humans are among such entities. If we are persons, the Supreme Being, which is the ground of our being, cannot be an individual of lesser perfection. God can only be of personal nature, with cognition, emotion and volition, of higher order. As with all beings God also

ONTIC RELATIONALITY

may have existence and essence, and these together constitute God's being. What God lacks is difference, because there is no second God. God is absolutely one of that kind. Since God's essence (divinity) is God's perfect way of existing and infinite possibilities of making the world exist, God's essence could be seen as identical with God's existence, as Aquinas submitted. God is different from other transmaterial and spiritual entities in virtue of God's absolute timelessness. This timelessness of God is called eternity. Without a past and a future in time, God is all-present.

God and the world do not exclude each other. God's all-encompassing being encompasses all existents. This is possible because that which transcends includes that which is transcended. God is absolute transcendence and this makes God unconstrained by any other category and at the same present (immanent) in all categories. Unlike how Hegel construed, the act of creation is not God's self-actualization. It is God's actualizing of God's many possibilities of creation. In God exist the principles of all things. God creates the world according to these archetypal ideas (exemplars) preexisting in God's mind. So we may say the world lies in God as word. Before creation, the world was latent in God in a "subtle" (ideal) form; and with possible dissolution, God can take back the world to this "subtle" state. The spatio-temporal actualization of God's eternal ideas may be called "actuation" (bringing something from ideal or possible state to actual state) or "eventuation" (making an idea into an event) of the world. Each entity is ultimately an actuation or eventuation of a divine

idea. This actuation of possibilities is God's free act, because God is not constrained by any category, but by own nature. God is self-constrained.

God acts in the world not by direct intervention, but through the natural order God has laid. The world follows the natural course of action outlined by the divine mind. It acts according to the mathematical equations God has done in space-time. At the same time God is not an "unmoved mover," unconcerned about creation. God is involved and is present in the world-process with love and care. This caring presence of God is called the divine providence in religious language. So creation is *creatio continua*, a continuous process. God brings a possibility to actuation and continues to maintain that thing in existence and perfects it continuously. Existence of evil (limitation of the world) is sometimes pointed out as an argument against God's existence. Evil is due to the limitedness of the world and this is part of creation. Creation entails limitation. It is impossible for God to create an all-perfect world, because it would amount to attempting to create another God. Even if God desires to create an all-perfect world, it would be impossible for God to do so. God is self-limited (self-constrained) by what is possible for God's divine nature to do. There can only be one Supreme Being. God may create a world as best as God can, but God cannot create a world as perfect as God. For reasons of the world's limitations, God cares for creation. God keeps the world going in divine providence. God helps humans cope with evil, and even bring good out of it. We are not to lose heart

in the face of evil, but to face it boldly. Moreover, the problem of evil challenges us to humanitarian actions that alleviate the sufferings of our fellow humans. Then we partake of God's caring about humans.

*The Human Person:
A Somatic-Psychic-Pneumatic Unity*

Finally we come to ourselves, the ontological category which we are, namely the human person. Humans stand in relationship with one another, with the world and God. In the concept and category of the human person all other ontologically fundamental concepts and categories meet and merge. The human self is a somatic-psychic-pneumatic unity.

Anthropologists classify modern humans as *homo sapiens* (wise human), meaning that our cerebral existence is higher than that of other *homo* species. Our brains are wired for advanced form of thought processing and self-consciousness. A person or subject is a thinking-feeling-willing particular. A person is self-aware of one's own identity as a thinking-feeling-willing entity. Humans are such persons.

What is central to the human person is his/her human self. The human self or subjectivity is not a disembodied, transcendent, ego in the Cartesian sense. It is the identity (individuality) of a human being, constituted by his/her bodily and transbodily existence. The self is my me, my I-am; it is my first-personal existence and experience. I continuously

constitute my self or subjectivity by my epistemic, ontic and ethic relationships with the world.

I am my self, my subjectivity, at three levels of my existence: somatic, psychic and pneumatic. I am a somatic-psychic-pneumatic unity. Classical Greek philosophy did not clearly distinguish between mind and soul. And indeed the Greek word *psychē* could be rendered either way. But in classical Indian thought, especially in the Upanishads, the human person is viewed as a tripartite complex of body (*śarira*) mind (*manas* or *citta*) and spirit (*ātman*). For the Upanishadic thinker, body and mind make the empirical self and spirit, the transcendent self. We do not make an empirical-transcendent divide for the human self. Human is a bodily, mental and spiritual *sakalya* (whole), a body-mind-spirit continuum. My body, mind and spirit are integral components that together make me. By living one's life in its integral bodily, psychological and spiritual dimensions one enters into an existential relation to things, people and God, and thereby one achieves the fulfillment of life.

The human self is a single whole and cannot be divided into somatic, psychic and pneumatic selves. However, for a better understanding we analyze it at three levels. Firstly, the human person is a somatic self. Human existence is an embodied existence. It is not that we live in body but we live our body. My body is my lived body, my "flesh" (Merleau-Ponty); and my insertion into the world (of things and persons) is through this flesh. I am a body-person, a body-subject. One's identity as a particular person is conveyed to another

person by one's bodily existence. A person is able to communicate to another his/her inner states, such as thoughts, emotions and volitions, only through bodily acts like gestures and speech. I communicate my self to another person by my bodily self. In body my self is open to other selves for interpersonal interaction. This relational character of the bodily self is obvious in the way we are sexual beings, for example. Sexuality (especially in its complementary male-female disclosure) opens one up to another person for sharing their selves in a profoundly meaningful and satisfying relationship.

Secondly, the human person is a psychic self. The human psychic self, which we ordinarily call mind, is not a substance like the Cartesian transcendent ego. It is a function. At the same time it is not merely a collection of perceptions (impressions), a series of mental events, as Hume and most Buddhists hold. It is a unified whole of our mental states of cognition, emotion and volition, which we call "rationality" or rational nature. Thought, emotion and volition together constitute human rationality. Thought is our awareness of the object we cognize, emotion is our affection (being affected) caused by that awareness, and volition is our choice of possible action motivated by that affection. Every emotion has a thought behind it, and every volition has an emotion attached to it. Mind, together with body, gives unity and continuity to the self, which is one's ontological identity. The Buddhist and Humean position is true with regard to an aspect of the mental self, namely memory. The brain retains

perceptions (impressions) as traces of memory, which neuroscientists call engrams. Mind is more than memory. Kant follows a middle course between Descartes and Hume. For him mind is a transcendental unity of thought, whose nature is unknown, for the most part whether it is a substance. It gives unity and continuity to my conscious being.

Thirdly, the human person is a pneumatic self. Owing to our ontic relationality to God, there exists a divine element in us, commonly called spirit (pneuma) or soul. (Daoism would say all things possess something of Dao, called *de*, the character of Dao. Religion tends to take the soul to be a spiritual substance, capable of self-subsisting, i.e. capable of existing independent of the body it animates). It does the function of linking us to God. It is the presence of God in us, making us spiritual beings, oriented to God. It makes one a child of God. What the idea of the soul suggests, then, is our existential relationship and openness to the Divine. The second-century Christian saint Irenaeus said: The glory of God is a living human, and the life of a human consists in beholding God (*Against Heresies*, 4.20.7). We hold divinity in our humanity, and a spiritual person is one who is able to behold God in his/her humanity and in the humanity of others. Such a person can hold persons and things, indeed the whole cosmos, in the warmth of divine love and mystical union. His/her life and action becomes something of the Divine, because when we care for nature we partake of God's care for nature, and when we love humanity, we partake of God's love for humanity. For a person who beholds divinity in

ONTIC RELATIONALITY

humanity, metaphysics transcends into mysticism, philosophical and religious talk culminates in contemplative silence, and life becomes radiant with love.

4

ETHIC RELATIONALITY

What we mean by ethic relationality is human interpersonal relationality, exemplified by an ethics of intersubjectivity. (Ethic is used as a variant for ethical. It also means a particular ethical vision we outline below. Although ethics and morality are often used interchangeably, today many writers make a difference between the two words. Ethics is broader in concept and application. It focuses on the good life, while morality's primary concern is right conduct. If this is a defensible distinction, our interest here is ethical, rather than moral). The good of life is human wellbeing. All people seek this. We have wellbeing when the whole of our embodied existence goes well. It is satisfaction or happiness of life,

ETHIC RELATIONALITY

resulting from our physical, psychological and spiritual needs being reasonably met. As relational beings, our wellbeing is dependent a lot on our meaningful interpersonal relationships and social living. There is in us a basic drive to relate with others, an existential openness to other humans. We have seen in the second chapter (epistemic relationality) that a self needs another self for recognizing and accepting it as a self, a subject. My seeking for the other and the other's positive response to my seeking makes interpersonal living possible. This existential going beyond of oneself to the other for an interpersonal relationality could be called one's ethic self-transcendence.

We seek out others for relationships, ranging from formal social relations to intimate personal ones. Varying degrees of reciprocity and responsibility characterize all these relations, with close relationships having more of mutual understanding, care and commitment. Relations play a significant role in ensuring one's wellbeing and satisfaction. Most psychologists believe that a psychologically healthy and happy person is one who can relate with others meaningfully. Hence ethics, which is my consideration of others for their wellbeing and others' consideration of me for my wellbeing, is central to our life with others. Ethics is for promotion of human wellbeing.

Sense of Cohumanity

Ethics demands that I regard for others' wellbeing. This ethical imperative is not something external, but, as Kant held in a different context, it is internal to our rational nature. Morality is due to human rationality. We have a rational insight into our human existence as coexistence and our humanity as cohumanity. To be more precise, we have the rational ability to find cohumanity in our fellow humans. There exists in all human beings this basic ethical sense, the sense of cohumanity. (The Confucian concept *ren*, meaning benevolence or "humanity," may be a fine interpretation of this sense of cohumanity). This ethical sense is not merely a sentiment of benevolence (Shaftesbury, Hutcheson and Hume) but our consciousness about ethical relationality. It forms the foundation of all ethics and morality. Hence ethics or morality is not so much about good and bad of our actions, but our relationship with others.

Some ethicists consider the basic ethical sense in us to be the result of our internalization of societal values. I submit that it is not merely a cultural product, but rather it is some inherent, genetically inherited, disposition of our rationality. (Scientists have almost completely decoded the human genome, placing more than 3 billion subunits of DNA in correct sequence, and are now in a better position to tell more about our moral evolution). In fact, both nature and nurture have played their role and have reinforced each other in the evolution of human moral rationality. The structure of

our brain, for example, determines how we experience the world; and our experiences, in turn, influence how our brain receives, processes and transmits information. Thus on the one hand internalization of values is possible due to our genetic predisposition, and on the other, internalization of values can enhance this predisposition. Animals do not demonstrate such a moral sense. They may have some instincts for fellow animals. But our brains are wired for a better logic for showing consideration to the members of our species. Our rationality tells us that hurting other humans is bad and promoting their welfare is good. There could be many competing visions of the good life. But none goes against the basic moral logic in us to respect the human person. That's why even when we disapprove an action, we shouldn't disrespect the person. Owing to some flaw in his/her cognitive and behavioral pattern, an antisocial or a psychopath fails to be motivated by this moral rationality. But in the normal run people have the moral disposition towards cohumanity. At the same time we should not be unrealistic to forget that there is in us an inborn tendency for seeking self-interest. Per se, there is nothing wrong about it. It is part of our built-in need for self-preservation. But our moral rationality, the sense of cohumanity, should keep our egoism in check.

Despite many instances of human rights violations, past and present, we can generally say that people have always taken cohumanity as the criterion of morality and social living. It makes us show respect for the human person. A good example is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,

adopted by the UN in 1948. In the wake of the Nazi atrocities, the world community reaffirmed its faith in human dignity. It is this regard and respect for the human person that made society evolve to the present level of liberal democracy. Arguably, liberal democracy is presently the best available form of political society. A liberal democracy is one that upholds people's right to self-determination in political governance, approves of cultural pluralism and guarantees fundamental human rights and personal freedoms. It is committed to civic equality. The liberal democracy is the result of people's self-consciousness that the individual human being is important and the political value is to promote human wellbeing. The political structure is in place to safeguard and advance human development and welfare. The political and moral good is human wellbeing. Therefore the state is to promote people's wellbeing by ensuring fair distribution of social and economic goods, protection of individual liberties and fundamental rights, and maintenance of communal peace. However, the promotion of human wellbeing is to be done with respect for human dignity. The modern liberal democracy will not sanction an action that violates human dignity, even when it is intended for people's good. All human rights are based on the inviolability of human dignity. Human wellbeing is to be promoted without violating human dignity. It is unethical and dehumanizing to neglect human wellbeing and infringe human dignity. An act is judged morally acceptable (morally good) if it enhances human welfare, preserving the dignity of human life. For modern liberal

democracy, the political and moral good is, in short, individual wellbeing and human dignity. The state sees that appropriate laws protect this good.

Human Subjectivity

The idea of cohumanity makes us perceive that ethics is relational. I become an ethical person in the context of interpersonal relationships. But the question remains: why should I be ethical to others and others to me? Neither is it me that constitutes another as an ethical being, nor is the other person that constitutes me as an ethical being. If it were so, all ethics would have been a matter of personal taste and you and I could not have agreed on any course of action, making social life totally anarchic and impossible. So the answer should come from a metaphysical analysis of the human person. (What we say below complements our reflections on the human person the third chapter).

If you and I, as particular individuals, can neither constitute nor become the norm of morality, we should put our selves behind the “veil of ignorance” (Rawls). When my ego and your ego are thus temporarily suspended, what emerges is the human I which is present in you and me, making both of us human subjects. It is to this human subjectivity that we, the particular you and me, can subscribe. Humans are ethical persons by virtue of being subjects and never objects.

We have seen elsewhere (third chapter) that the subject is a thinking, feeling and willing entity. Reason (thought), emotion and volition – this triple mental function makes an entity a subject. Our brains are wired to think, feel and choose. These interrelated actions together constitute the human mind or consciousness. In the exercise of these mental functions we become self-aware that we are subjects and not objects. If an entity does not possess these mental properties, it is considered an object. The human person is a subject and always refuses to be an object. The dignity of a human person arises out of the irreducibility of his/her subjectivity to objectivity. The Kantian imperative to treat at all times a human being as an end and never as a means is corollary to it. Moral, political and legal rectitude is to be judged on this criterion. Each human being, as subject, is valuable per se and demands our recognition, respect and regard. Promotion of human wellbeing is to be done with respect for the human subject, as rational, emotional and free being. Policies and programs should be assessed for their potential to advance human welfare with due respect for this human dignity. All human rights flow from the dignity of the human person as a rational, emotional and free subject. Violation of a fundamental human right thus becomes the violation of human subjectivity and insult to human dignity.

As a subject, I have inalienable right to my thought, emotion and decision. I reflect on my experience and form epistemically justified beliefs; I feel about my experience and seek adequate fulfillment of my emotional needs; and I want to exercise my free choice and make sense of my life and its

experience. If I, as a subject, have right to cognition, emotion and volition, I should accord the same right to other humans. Here a legitimate doubt might be raised regarding how I can know that other persons also are conscious, emotional and autonomous (free) agents like me. After all, I am able to know for sure only my own states of mind. Nonetheless, from the fact that others do have a similar bodily identity as mine (mental states are due to the nervous system) and from what others communicate to me in speech and gestures, I can reasonably infer that other people also have the similar mental states which I have. And if other people have thoughts, emotions and volitions like mine, they are subjects on a par with me. They require the same regard that I accord to myself and my obligation to respect them becomes a universal moral imperative.

What about the marginal ones who cannot fully exercise their subjectivity or personality, like infants, the severely mentally challenged and the irreversibly comatose? They also need to be accorded the same human dignity we are privileged to enjoy. Here I make a distinction between actuality and intentionality. (What I am talking about is ontological intentionality and not epistemological intentionality that we have discussed in the second chapter). Those of us who can actually exercise our subjectivity have actual subjectivity. Those who are unable to do it have only intentional subjectivity, or rather ontological intentionality for subjectivity. The intent of human existence, at any stage, is for being conscious, emotional and autonomous. We ought to respect this ontological intent or orientation of human life.

Any attempt to reduce a subject to an object is an unethical act. If another human being were intrinsically liable to objectification (reification), there wouldn't be any immorality for my effort to objectify him/her. Moreover, this attempt is an ontological failure. I am attempting to perform an ontologically impossible task. I might try to reduce a person to the level of an object by denying his/her right to thought, emotion and volition, but I will fail in the end. Because as long as the other person can think, feel and will, his/her subjectivity will be intact. By my effort of dehumanizing the other person, it is not the other but I that finally becomes dehumanized and unethical. In other words, when I do an unethical act to another, the act rebounds on me and makes me unethical. I become less relational and thus less human.

Human Intersubjectivity

Having a good judgment of cohumanity and recognizing others' subjectivity are only the first half of our ethic relationality. The second half is the practice of intersubjectivity. (Our analysis of intersubjectivity is different from that of Husserl's. In Husserl it is about knowing the existence of other subjects). Intersubjectivity is our living of ethic relationality. Here one goes beyond the self (oneself) to others for a positive interaction. A human needs the presence of another human to come to self-realization. Only persons, not objects (things), can recognize me and communicate to me.

Only to persons, not things, that I can communicate my self. The human being is thus a being-with. I *with* the other (not I *and* the other) make my ethically lived world. It is in this ethical lifeworld, the world in which we live our ethic relationality, that we achieve our wellbeing. (The idea of “lifeworld” is from Husserl). Intersubjectivity is thus basically a subject’s existential openness to its other. It is our ethical self-transcendence, our going out of the self to include the other.

Each subject is unique and autonomous, and he/she is irreducible to another subject. In the world of intersubjectivity persons are autonomous and they stand in a face-to-face relationship of equality and reciprocity. We agree with Levinas that the ethical responsibility comes through the other. In my encounter with the other, the other calls for my ethical response. But we do not believe that the other’s calling and my response to it is due to the other’s pleading for my mercy. Nor is it because the other is higher than I. But it is because of the ontological fact that the other is a subject, a person, on a par with me in dignity and basic liberties. A subject stands with another subject in a relation of mutual affirmation and enrichment. An ethical act is certainly an act of compassion, an act of feeling with. But ethics itself is more than sympathy and compassion. Ethics is ones’ responsibility and right at the same time. It arises out of human subjectivity and intersubjectivity. The ethical I-other encounter must be one of equality, mutual respect and reciprocity.

All interpersonal and social conflicts arise when we deny autonomy and subjectivity to other persons, either by trying to reduce them to ourselves or by attempting to make them objects. In this ontologically self-defeating and ethically dehumanizing act of denying others their subjecthood and rights attached to it, the ethical bad (sin for religion) enters into our lifeworld. Unless people recognize their ethic relationality and commit themselves to an ethics of intersubjectivity, they cannot get out of the tangle of an unhappy confrontational, conflictual social existence, which Hegel, Marx and Sartre speak of, and move on to a happy and meaningful social life of cooperation and concord, which Buber, Marcel and Levinas argue for. An intersubjective ethic, particularly in its political practice, requires us to have a genuinely free and fair dialogue with others. As Rawls and Habermas rightly suggest, a dialogical paradigm for intersubjectivity will protect the individual without putting community into jeopardy. It will prevent the political authority from being totalitarian, make law and judiciary more humane and make us concerned about the least advantaged. Ultimately what counts important is the wellbeing and dignity of the individual. Society is but people, the interactive persons.

The ethics of intersubjectivity speaks the truth that every human being is a subject and has inalienable dignity; it upholds fundamental human rights and personal freedoms. It demands a mutual respect for human dignity and responsibility for human welfare. The ethic of intersubjectivity makes our fundamental ethical task to be one of living our life with other

ETHIC RELATIONALITY

humans in a truly good and meaningful way. It makes us feel the warmth of our being as being-with-the-other, infusing meaning and happiness into our interpersonal and communal existence. It brings peace and prosperity to people, making national and international matrix work well. In a pluralistic and democratic society, people can come together and ensure peace and social harmony only on the ontological vision of the human person as subjective and intersubjective. We can unite in the name of the human person and the dignity of human life. When religions become divisive and ideologies clash, it is to the human subject that people can subscribe. The philosophy and ethics of intersubjectivity should be the antidote to a culture of death (terrorism and violence) and ethnic and communal hate. Where individuals are oppressed and their rights and freedoms are at stake and when those people and agencies accountable fail to safeguard and advance human welfare, the potential of the intersubjectivity vision shall not remain untapped. An ethics of intersubjectivity gives a human face to economy, trade and development. An ethics of intersubjectivity makes interpersonal relationships, at personal and societal levels, more satisfying.

Human ethic relationality extends to the nonhuman world too. As a being-part-of-the-world, the human being has ethical relationality to entire nature. As Mencius probably held, the human nature extends to nature and makes the universe an ethical universe. Furthermore, caring for nature is caring for humans. Harming the earth and its ecosystem is hamstringing humans themselves. For our sake and for the sake of generations to come, we are to be more eco-friendly.

Finally, ethic relationality is embedded in ontic relationality. My existence, the existence of other people and of the world is derived and designed by the Supreme Being. And my love for all beings, especially for my fellow humans, is partaking of God's love for all beings, especially for humans, who bear the special imprint of divine subjectivity. The human person is precious locus of divine presence. This transcendent or ontological perspective can reinforce our ethical vision of cohumanity and intersubjectivity. Our cognition and consciousness of the world, both human and nonhuman, is true and meaningful to the extent it becomes ontic and ethic. Our relationality - epistemic, ontic and ethic - constitutes our being. The being-principle of the human being is relationality - relationality in its epistemic, ontic and ethic features.



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Joseph Kaipayil
Human as Relational: A Study in Critical Ontology

This work is a sequel to the author's *Critical Ontology: An Introductory Essay* (2002), in which he propounded a new method of philosophizing called Critical Ontology. The present book is an attempt to look at and understand the human person, using the method of critical ontology. The being-principle of the human person is interpreted and understood as relationality. To be human is to be relational. Humanity is relationality.

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